

## Travel and Tourism Roundtable Notes – July 8, 2021

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Presented by: Perrin Beatty, President and CEO, Canadian Chamber of Commerce

Bonjour mesdames et messieurs et bienvenue. Mon nom est Perrin Beatty et je suis PDG de la Chambre de Commerce du Canada. Je suis très content de vous accueillir ce matin au Musée canadien de l'histoire et à cette scène magnifique.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation whose presence here reaches back to time immemorial. The Algonquins are the customary keepers and defenders of the Ottawa River Watershed and its tributaries. We honour their long history of welcoming many Nations to this beautiful territory and their culture and presence continue to nurture this land today.

With me today are colleagues from across the tourism and travel sector and industry representatives within Ottawa, including:

- Sueling Ching, President & CEO, Ottawa Board of Trade
- Susie Grynol, President of the Hotel Association of Canada
- Joe Kowalski, Founder of Wilderness Tours, Ottawa River
- Ross Meredith, Dual General Manager of The Westin Ottawa and Delta Hotels by Marriott, and
- Jamie Kwong, the Executive Director of the Ottawa Music Industry Coalition.

I've been around Ottawa for a long time. And in Ottawa, when the city is gearing up for an election, everybody can feel it. And we all know what an election means: it means a pause on government activity.

Right now, local businesses, particularly those in the travel and tourism sector, can't afford more delay. There is an urgent need for a reopening plan for the travel and tourism sector. Industry has been asking for a coherent plan for months.

In ordinary times, the National Capital Region's attractions, which include the Parliament Buildings, the museums, the Rideau Canal, the concerts, the parks, the festivals like the Festival de montgolfières de Gatineau, our world-class hotels and restaurants, and so many others are magnets for tourists.

In a normal year, Ottawa's tourism sector alone generates \$2.2 billion in revenue. Last year, however, \$1.4 billion was lost to COVID-19.

As we all know, summer plays a disproportionately important role for businesses in the travel and tourism sector. And for travel and tourism businesses in Ottawa and throughout the National Capital region, this summer isn't shaping up to be much better than the summer of 2020.

What's tragic is that there is no need to inflict such damage on the local economy. Nearly 50 per cent of Ottawa adults are now fully vaccinated and some 70 per cent have received one dose of the vaccine, making Ottawa one of the most vaccinated cities in the world. The results are obvious and extremely encouraging. As of yesterday afternoon, Ottawa Public Health reported that, in this market of over a million people, there were 43 known cases of COVID, only two of whom were in hospital, none in intensive care.

Despite this success, however, there is still no clear plan for restarting the travel that anchors so many businesses across the city.

The Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable has been crisscrossing the country. Earlier this week, it made a stop in Niagara Falls. Businesses in Niagara Falls, like Ottawa, are struggling. In fact, in every city the Roundtable visits the story is the same. Businesses – small, medium, and large -- are hurting. And they are all struggling for the same reason: a lack of clarity on reopening both the economy and the border.

We keep hearing that plans are coming, but it's now well into July and the 2021 tourist season is fast disappearing. Businesses simply cannot afford to wait any longer.

Last weekend it was reported that the Canadian border would remain closed until 75 per cent of Canadians were fully vaccinated. And as Canadians rush to get vaccinated in droves – breaking record after record – this goal seems ambitious but attainable.

I have spoken to business leaders across the country, and many agree with this metric. Business owners aren't picky. What they ask for is a plan they can rely on. A plan that allows for preparation, rehiring and retooling — a predictable path forward that creates confidence for the future.

And they need lead time to prepare. Whether you are talking about a restaurant, the border or a festival, it's much easier to shut it down than to reopen it, particularly if you're doing so in stages.

Canada is quickly becoming of the most vaccinated places on the planet. However, it remains one of the most restricted, particularly in Ontario. Canadians need clarity and certainty, which today we don't have. And the goal posts keep moving. It's time to pick a goal, and to stay with it.

We need to start applying a business lens to decisions about COVID-19. At the start of the pandemic, our collective understanding of the virus was limited. Understandably, the strategy was stay at home, flatten the curve, return to Canada, shut the borders. Everything made sense, particularly with the information we had at the time.

However, we have entered a different period of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period characterized by vaccines, better science, and an informed public. And we need to start making decisions that better reflect the time where we are today.

In Canada, this means a comprehensive and coherent plan to safely reopen our economy, a plan to reopen the Canada – U.S. border to fully-vaccinated individuals (because COVID does not recognise your passport, but it certainly does recognize your vaccine), and a clear vaccination certification process to support the recovery of the industry and the Canadian economy.

We need that plan today, not after an election, and it needs to be based on medical science, not political science.

Canadians by the tens of millions are doing their part. What we ask is that our leaders do theirs.

And now I'm pleased to pass the microphone to my colleague, Sueling Ching, President & CEO of the Ottawa Board of Trade.